

die real slow cause I love love love you. And then there's this instrumental part that's done with synthesizers and there's a woman's voice and it sounds like she's moaning. Well, that's me. I'm the one moaning, plus I sing back-up on the chorus. I was nineteen when we recorded that. I just couldn't help pointing the song out to Castilla. She was really impressed. "Quick," she said, "hand me some money so I can play the sucker!" She played the song and I sang along with the chorus. "That really is you!" she said. Suddenly her whole attitude towards me went through this complete transformation; it was like the old days, when Dilation were tops in the virtual charts and people used to recognize me everywhere I went.

She got all excited and said she knew she'd seen me somewhere before, I looked so familiar. She started going on about all the virtuals, like the one for Cut Me, where Derek slashes me with a razor and then I rise headless out of a grave, wearing a blood-spattered gown. And of course, *Satan's Child*, which is most people's favourite. Everyone knows that one, it's where Dilation ride their Harleys into a derelict church and I'm strapped to the altar and suddenly the guitars turn into chainsaws and you get to choose whether they slice me up or have sex with me.

"Girl," she kept telling me, "anybody'd who'd leave a band like Dilation for this shit is crazy! You're fucked up in the head, you know that?"

"They can't sing, Castilla. I was the only one of them who had any kinda voice, but they just kept me in the background most of the time, like some kinda decoration. And in every single virtual, they killed me off! Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, I did twenty virtuals with them, and I got murdered twenty different ways. They hung me, they shot me, they electrocuted me, they cut off my head. You name it, they did it to me. That shit can get annoying."

"You can't take that stuff personally. Every virtual's gotta have somebody die. That's what sells the song. You should know that!"

I tried to tell her how Dilation's guitars were just fashion accessories 'cause none of them could even play an instrument, the computer did it all, and how they couldn't even work the computer themselves, there was this guy who did it for them. And she just said, "Who cares about music? They're such pretty little boys."

And then I tried to tell her how they're not little boys, they're in their forties and you wouldn't look twice at them if you saw them in the street, the computer pretties them up for the virtuals. And she said but you don't look any different in person, and I said of course not, I didn't need twenty years taken off of me. Then I told her that Derek Dilation's real name is Stan Bukowski and Clive Curettage is Sidney Hars-tein, and that Stan's got boils and Sidney's got bad breath. But she just said she'd slip old Sidney a peppermint anytime. I gave up.

Castilla nearly took a sip of her grapefruit juice, then realized what she was doing and put it down on top of the jukebox. She looked around the room, winked and tilted her head towards the front door. I turned slightly, trying not to be too obvious, and saw a man standing near the door, staring at Castilla. I could have sworn the guy was drooling.

"I still think you're crazy," she said, watching the

man watching her. "What's it matter what anyone's like in real life anyway? Who cares if they're Derek or Stanley or Sidney or whatever, those guys are stars! I've got them on virtual and that's good enough for me. That's good enough for most people. Why'd you ever wanna leave them and come on the job?" I told her my Irish grandfather'd been a Captain. "Oh, God," she said. "So it's the family business. That explains a lot."

The man she'd been watching started walking towards us. She took a small gold compact from her bag, and started dabbing powder on her nose and chin. "What do you think, Rosie?" She called me Rosie. Fifteen minutes earlier, I'd been Gonzales.

"I think he likes you," I said. "That doesn't mean he's a slasher, does it?"

"We'll find out, won't we?" Castilla leaned back against the wall, striking a perfect pose. I glanced over at the bar and I saw the look on Frankie's face. Now I knew why the guy seemed like such a sullen bastard, he was in love. "He's getting closer, Rosie. This is where I get to be an actress, just like you in the virtuals. Lights, camera, action!" Castilla placed one hand on her bare dark thigh, long red nails drumming her tattooed dragon. I got out of the way.

Castilla and the guy talked for a few minutes; Castilla was laughing. Then they headed towards the black curtain. She wasn't supposed to do that. I looked over at Frankie O'Hara. His face had gone green.

We both lit cigarettes and waited.

**T**hey came out less than five minutes later. The man looked angry; Castilla looked ill. I rushed over to her. "You okay? Is that our guy?"

She mumbled something about leaving her alone, and stumbled into the ladies' room. I followed her in and found her kneeling in one of the stalls, heaving into the bowl. "You all right?" I said. "What happened?"

She staggered to her feet. "Shit," she said. She took a wad of toilet paper, sprayed it with disinfectant, and stuffed it under her leotard, between her legs. "I'm still bleeding."

"Bleeding? What'd he do to you? Oh my God, he's getting away!"

She waddled over to the sink. "Shut the fuck up, Rosie! He's not the slasher."

"Then what's going on? Why are you sick? Why are you bleeding?"

"Will you shut up?" she hissed, pointing at my earring. I finally understood; she didn't want Bruce to hear. She took off her earring and indicated that I do the same. Then she unstrapped the bag from around my waist, opened it up, and dropped both our earring mikes inside it. She placed my bag in the sink, and turned on the tap. "What are you doing?" I said. "My badge and my gun are in there!"

"Shut the fuck up, will you? Your bag's waterproof, I've got one just like it at home."

"You gonna tell me what's going on?"

Castilla nodded wearily and slumped to the floor, leaning her head against the pipes beneath the sink. "Lock the door," she told me. "I don't want any assholes walking in." There was a metal bolt; I slid it across.

She closed her eyes. "It wasn't like I expected. It



George R.R. Martin

Iowa, for three years, teaching college. Dubuque is on the Mississippi. It's an old river town that was once a centre of steamboat manufacture. It's very much a town that looks back to its past and is imbued with a very rich sense of history. I got interested in that history while I was living there, and particularly as it related to the river, which is an amazing thing that very much dominates that town. I began to read up on the steamboats. I'd always wanted to do a vampire book. I had a few ideas of my own about how to do it, which were largely science-fictional ideas. I mean, even though vampires are traditionally a supernatural-horror construct I wanted to adopt a more rationalist approach to them, and treat them as a case of parallel evolution – a predatory race living among us. This was the approach I took, but I combined it with the steamboats and the historical setting; exactly why, I don't know. They just sort of fit together in my head."

Putting vampires on boats is perhaps not the most obvious thing to do – after all, traditionally they aren't supposed to be able to cross water. "Well, that's one reason why I had to do a science-fictional approach. Obviously you couldn't do it with the supernatural fear of water thing. But the water thing really makes no sense. I mean, even when I write horror I think my mind works in a very science-fictional way.

"I'm not a religious person in any sense. So much of horror when you examine it, is rooted in Christianity – in the case of Satan stories or possessed child stories, or even vampire stories, which have a certain Christianity underlying them. Or, if not Christianity, pre-Christian religions, paganism and things like that.

"Religions are allowed to be illogical: after all, it's all God and devils and stuff. But a lot of it when you look at it logically doesn't make any sense. Like vampires: I mean, why can't they cross running water? You can make sense of some things. They don't go out in the sunlight because they are photosensitive, because sunlight burns them. It harms them. Their skin cannot take the ultraviolet light. That makes perfect sense. You can even justify garlic as an allergy. But other things? You know, they don't show up in a mirror – Why not? If you go back into vampire legends, the reasons they don't show up in the mirror are again predominantly religious reasons in one sense or another. One is that vampires have no souls. Their souls have been lost. It's the soul that gets reflected in the mirror, which is a lovely romantic theory but what we know about light reflection and things like that lead us to say 'that's not true.' There's another even odder legend that says – and I always thought this one was particularly goofy – vampires don't show up in the mirror

because Judas Escariot was paid with thirty pieces of silver, and so silver was defamed. So to make it up to silver, God said that silver would not have to reflect vampires. Anyway, so my vampires show up in mirrors, and they can cross running water, but they are sensitive to light."

**M**artin's other "big novel" was *Armageddon Rag*: "It's my rock-and-roll novel, very different from *Fever Dream*. It has a contemporary setting but is really about a survivor of the 1960s. A very hard novel to classify – kind of horror, kind of fantasy, kind of mainstream, a bit of a murder mystery. It served to confuse my marketing identity even further. That's the last real novel I've done."

It brought the tally of Martin's novels to three, plus *Windhaven*, his collaboration with Lisa Tuttle. "Lisa still lived in the United States then, but we lived pretty far apart. When we first started working on it I lived in Chicago and she lived in Texas, and we continued it after I moved to Dubuque. Essentially I would write a section and send it to her. She would rewrite what I wrote and write more and send it back to me, and so on. So it kept going back and forth and getting longer and longer. We would occasionally have discussions about where we were going, but for the most part we just started at the beginning and kept going